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Draft Speech for Secretary McNamara

Daniel Ellsberg, July 22, 1965

(Discussed on pages 88-97 of *Secrets*)

It is the intent of the United States Government, reaffirmed on many occasions, to do whatever is necessary to help South Vietnam preserve its independence.

I have just returned from a trip to South Vietnam, with Ambassador Lodge and General Wheeler, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to help us determine what is, now necessary.. It was our purpose to review the force level planned for South Vietnam, the number of U.S. troops to be assigned there, the equipment required, the expected consumption of munitions and other products. We had the opportunity for full. discussions with Ambassador Taylor, with General Westmoreland and other senior U.S. Commanders, and with Premier Ky and members of the GVN, all of whom gave us their latest appreciation of the requirements for moving toward our mutual objectives in SVN.

Our discussions confirmed, in considerably more detail, the situation as I described it for the press just before leaving: that the Viet Cong have continued to increase their forces in South Vietnam, importantly through continued infiltration of troops, leadership, and now, regular North Vietnamese combat units; that the level and intensity of operation during the summer has increased, as we predicted it would; and that we can expect further increases in Viet Cong operations because of the likely commitment of forces not yet committed to combat. As the President had already stated, we left for SVN with the knowledge that our findings might well show an increased American response on the ground in SVN to be necessary: which, in turn, would require steps to insure that our reserves of men and equipment in the U.S. remained adequate for any and all emergencies. We returned with the convictions shared also by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Westmoreland and other senior. U.S. Commanders, that these steps were indeed urgently required.

We shall be adding, in the near future, combat and support troops

totaling about 100,000 to those already within SVN. Our forces there will defend their own bases; they will assist in providing security in neighboring areas; and they will be available for more active combat missions when the Vietnamese Government and General Westmoreland agree that such active missions are needed, as they surely will be. To offset these additional deployments and to reconstitute the central reserve, we shall be calling up some reserve units, increasing our draft calls and extending some tours of duty.

At this time, when we are calling for new burdens and sacrifices from the families and young men of this country, it is right that we should spell out once again why it is that these efforts are needed. What is the nature of the conflict in which we are participating in SVN, and what are the stakes in that conflict for the people of the United States and the free world? I can best address those broad issues by focusing some questions on the role of the men who are being called upon to hazard their lives in the service of their country.

Why are they needed in Vietnam, at this time? Who are the people they are fighting to protect in that country, and who are they fighting against? Finally, what are they fighting for, in Southeast Asia and in terms of the broader interests of the United States? .

First: the need for urgent deployment of additional U.S. troops. It has become clear, in the last two months, that neither our earlier evidences of our commitment to the defense of SVN, nor our repeated offers of unconditional discussions, have persuaded the Government of North Vietnam to abandon its attempt to win control of the people of South Vietnam by the military victory of the Communist-led Viet Cong forces. On the contrary, the Viet Cong, directed and supported by Hanoi, have quickened the pace of their terrorism and military attacks. They evidently hope to crack, this summer, the major obstacle to their success: the unbroken morale of the armed forces of South Vietnam and of the people they defend, the majority of the population who are hostile to a Viet Cong victory.

The summer offensive strategy of the Viet Cong appears to be to overwhelm isolated army units, outposts and outmanned relief columns and to overrun lightly defended district towns. In order to inflict 2,000 killed upon the SVN armed forces in the months of May and June, the Viet Cong have been willing to commit previously unused main force units, some in regimental strength, and to accept among their own troops over 5,000 dead at the hands of the defenders and South-Vietnamese and American air support. At the same time, Viet Cong terrorism has taken on increasingly large scale. They have begun to burn entire villages in the Central Highlands of Vietnam and to kidnap the entire population of others; in recent months, over 375,000 refugees have fled from their depredations.

This summer South Vietnam is in crisis. That Hanoi is gambling for

First, we are acting in Vietnam to keep a promise. We are sending troops because they are needed to help preserve South Vietnam's independence, and we have promised to do what was needed. That promise has been made by three successive Presidents, clearly and in constant terms.

Both our behavior and our success are being watched by all those nations in the world who regard their security as dependent upon any form of U.S. assurance. Here is one place where Communist China and the United States Government agree on the importance of this issue. As we do, Communist China sees the words and actions of the U.S. Government as having forged a clear commitment to the independence of South Vietnam; as we do, she sees the future influence of the United States in the Far East and in many other parts of the world as turning on whether that commitment is proved to be worthless. The value of the national promise of the United States is at stake; and no stake in this contest can be greater in importance to our own national interest.

Second, we are acting in Vietnam to draw a stop-line in Asia. Since the end of the Second World War, the leaders of what is now North Vietnam have worked to impose a Communist state under their control over all of Vietnam. Their further ambitions extend at least to the remaining parts of former French Indochina—Laos and Cambodia. And the appetite and ambition of the regime that has supported them and spurs them on—Communist China—are far more huge, and not limited to the Asian continent. A Free World withdrawal from the present challenge in the jungles and mountains of Vietnam would merely transfer the battle line to other places.

In the last quarter of a century we have seen aggression in a variety of forms; and those kinds we faced up to most resolutely, we have not met again. Massive invasion, in World War II; invasion by satellite proxy, in Korea; an attempt at “non-nuclear blackmail,” in Berlin; an attempt at “nuclear blackmail” in Cuba. Where we stood firm, we were spared further confrontations.

No less than others, Communist China, for all its bluster, has drawn the lessons of those episodes. But just because other forms of aggression have been blocked, Peking has not despaired of finding new paths to conquest. In Communist China we confront an opponent that views international politics as a whole as a vast guerrilla struggle, in which a stronger enemy's weak points are to be found and patiently exploited. A Communist world dominated by Peking, they know, lies a long way off. But the way to it is the guerrilla's way, intimidating, ambushing, demoralizing and weakening those who would uphold an alternative world order.

The Peking leaders believe that a succession of defeats inflicted at points of an enemy's weakness, no matter how great his initial superiority, will gradually erode his strength, his support and his

morale and eventually reduce him to absolute inferiority. It is a strategy that worked for them in their own revolution, and has succeeded in other contests. It demands, above all, patience; and a long-term confidence based on contempt for the patience, the will and resolution of the opponent. The Peking leadership has both.

We are being tested. In blunt terms: have we the guts, the grit, the determination to stick with a frustrating, bloody, difficult course as long as it takes to see it through without getting bored or despairing, without losing sight of all our objectives, without being lured by false promises of short-cuts? The Asian Communists are sure that we have not.

That is why they are not interested in discussions of a settlement; to achieve total victory, they believe, they need only wait for us to quit. And the Chinese Communists, far more even than Hanoi, want a total victory in this confrontation. They are concerned with bigger stakes than the control of South Vietnam; in the worldwide guerrilla struggle they see themselves conducting against the United States, South Vietnam itself is to be our Dienbienphu.

The only question is how long it will take. Two years? Three years? How long will it be, they ask their listeners sardonically, before the U.S. tires of its wearisome task, how long will it maintain the efforts it has pledged?

There is only one answer for us to give. It was made for us three years ago, by an American statesman whose death the world mourns this month, in the midst of another crisis that tested our resolution.

Till hell freezes over.

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